

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 000885
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: S/S-O:PRHAYES

APPROVED BY: S/S-O:RPERITO

EA/VLC:JOHNSON

DESIRED DISTRIBUTION:S/S

-----042150Z 070892 /46

R 041934Z JAN 77

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T STATE 000885

EXDIS MILITARY ADDEE HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOLLOWING IS REPEAT VIENTIANNE 011 SENT SECSTATE 03 JAN 77:

QUOTE S E C R E T VIENTIANE 0011

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LA US

SUBJ: FUTURE COURSE OF U.S. RELATIONS WITH LAOS

REF: (A) 75 VIENTIANE 5728, (B) 75 STATE 270314, (C)
VIENTIANE 6476, (D) VIENTIANE 537, (E) 76 STATE 134812,
(F) 76 VIENTIANE 1310, (G) 76 STATE 144785, (H) 76
VIENTIANE 1420, (I) 76 VIENTIANE 1723, (J) 76
VIENTIANE A-40.
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SUMMARY: OUR RELATIONS WITH LPDR REMAIN AT CORRECT
LEVEL WITH LPDR INSISTING ON ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND CESSATION
OF ALLEGED AID TO REACTIONARIES AS CONDITIONS FOR ANY IMPROVE-
MENT, WHILE WE STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIA QUESTION AND
CANNOT DISCUSS ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. SOVIET INFLUENCE OVER-
SHADOWS PRC INFLUENCE IN LAOS BUT VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IS
CLEARLY DOMINANT. LPDR "REVOLUTION" IS PROCEEDING WITH INCREASING
VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. PREEMINENCE OF VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE
IN LAOS AND PREDOMINANCE OF VIETNAMESE POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
SUGGEST FUTURE COURSE OF US RELATIONS WITH LAOS WILL BE

LARGELY DETERMINED BY U.S. RELATIONS WITH VIET-NAM. U.S. RELATIONS WITH VIET-NAM IN TURN ARE LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY SOUTHEAST ASIAN VIEW OF VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS. ANY FUTURE U.S.-VIETNAMESE DIALOGUE SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY PARALLEL DIALOGUE WITH LPDR TO MINIMIZE DIFFICULTIES WITH LATTER. END SUMMARY.

1. THIS TELEGRAM IS A COMPANION PIECE TO AIRGRAM A-40 OF DECEMBER 31, 1976, WHICH DESCRIBED EVENTS AFFECTING US/LAO RELATIONS SINCE OUR LAST COMPREHENSIVE REPORT (REF D).

2. THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC'S (LPDR) CONCEPT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT WE ARE MAINTAINING A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN LAOS BECAUSE WE FIND IT USEFUL IN THE WAKE OF THE INDOCHINA DEBACLE AND THAT WE SHOULD THEREFORE PAY FOR IT. SUCH PAYMENT, THEY THINK, SHOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A CONTRIBUTION TO "BINDING UP THE WOUNDS OF WAR". THE LAO WANT SUCH A CONTRIBUTION FOR POLITICAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC REASONS. THEY HAVE MAINTAINED FOR A LITTLE OVER A YEAR,NOW, THAT SOME SUCH CONTRIBUTION IS AN INDISPENSABLE CONDITION FOR ANY IMPROVEMENT IN US/LAO RELATIONS. MEANWHILE, OUR RELATIONS REMAIN ON THE "CORRECT" LEVEL. IN PRACTICE THIS MEANS THE LPDR AUTHORITIES ARE POLITE ON THE SURFACE BUT HOSTILE BENEATH THE SURFACE AND IN THEIR PROPAGANDA.

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3. THE LPDR IS CLOSELY LINKED TO THE SRV THROUGH PERSONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE LEADERS, LONG STANDING PARTY TIES, A HISTORY OF WARTIME COOPERATION, GEOGRAPHY AND IDEOLOGY. THE RELATIONSHIP IS A CLOSE AND SPECIAL ONE AND MARKED BY THE FACT THAT VIET-NAM'S POPULATION IS ABOUT 45 MILLION PEOPLE WHILE THE POPULATION OF LAOS IS NO MORE THAN 3,500,000 PEOPLE (OPTIMISTIC ESTIMATE BY VICE FOREIGN MINISTER LAST FEBRUARY), OF WHOM ONLY ABOUT ONE HALF ARE ETHNIC LAO. THE REST ARE THE SAME SORT OF INDOCHINESE MOUNTAINEERS AS THE TWO MAJOR GROUPINGS FOUND IN NORTH AND SOUTH VIET-NAM. THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE VIETNAMESE MILITARY PRESENCE IN POSITION IN LAOS. UNDER ALL THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT THE LAO LEADERSHIP WOULD BE ABLE TO PURSUE A POLICY INDEPENDENT OF THE WISHES OF THE SRV EVEN IF IT WANTED TO.

4. THE OLD LAOS, AS WE HAVE REPORTED IN DETAIL OVER THE PAST SIXTEEN MONTHS, HAS LONG GONE AND WITH IT HAVE GONE "NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PROCEDURES" AND ALL THE CLICHES ABOUT "LITTLE LAOS". THE "REVOLUTION", IS GOING FORWARD, SLOWLY AND AWKWARDLY, BUT STEADILY. THE LPDR LEADERS MAKE NO APOLOGIES FOR THE ARRESTS AND INTERNAL EXILE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE.

5. THEY ARE CONFIDENT OF THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNIST WORLD, MAINTAIN THAT THIRD WORLD OPINION SUPPORTS THEM AND CLAIM TO

BELIEVE THAT U.S. PUBLIC OPINION, AS DISTINGUISHED FROM U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY, ALSO SUPPORTS THEM.

6. THEY CONSIDER THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND ARE SUPPORTING LAO REACTIONARIES WHO ARE TRYING TO OVERTHROW THE LPDR REGIME. THEY ARE DEAF TO ASSURANCES TO THE CONTRARY AND AT THE SAME TIME UNABLE TO DOCUMENT THEIR CHARGES.

7. ALTHOUGH THE LPDR IS CLOSELY UNITED WITH THE SRV, SOVIET ASSISTANCE AND VISIBLE PRESENCE IN LAOS (AND VIET-NAM) ARE OF
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GREAT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE. SOVIET INFLUENCE CLEARLY OVERSHADOWS THAT OF THE PRC AT PRESENT IN BOTH LAOS AND VIET-NAM, BUT WE STILL BELIEVE THAT IN THE LONG RUN CONSIDERATIONS OF RACE, STYLE AND GEOGRAPHY WILL ALTER THIS BALANCE.

8. WE FIND NO SUBSTANCE IN REPORTS WHICH RECUR FROM TIME TO TIME THAT THERE IS A SPLIT IN THE LPDR LEADERSHIP ON THE ISSUE OF ORIENTATION EXCLUSIVELY TOWARDS THE COMMUNIST POWERS VERSUS OPENING TOWARD THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD. THERE ARE NO DOUBT DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AMONG THE LEADERSHIP BASED ON PERSONALITY CONFLICTS AND PERSONAL AMBITION. IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT THE SRV WOULD TOLERATE ANY INDEPENDENT OPENING OF LAOS TOWARDS A NON-COMMUNIST THAILAND OR OTHER NON-COMMUNIST POWERS.

9. IN MID-AUGUST, 1975, THE UNITED STATES WAS INTERESTED IN DETERMINING IF WE COULD CONTINUE TO HAVE RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS (PGNU) IN THE LIGHT OF THE RECENT ANTI-AMERICAN GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND GOVERNMENT-FOMENTED DEMONSTRATIONS. WE ARE PREPARED TO MAINTAIN SUCH RELATIONS BUT NOT AT A GREAT PRICE. BY DECEMBER, 1975, OUR POSITION HAD BECOME THAT THE HEALING EFFECTS OF TIME WERE NEEDED IN INDOCHINA AND THAT OUR ATTITUDE TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE THREE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION INCLUDING LAOS WOULD BE DETERMINED BY THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS US AND TOWARD THEIR NEIGHBORS. A LEGISLATIVE PROHIBITION MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO CONSIDER ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO LAOS AND WE HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT WE ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO ACQUIRING INFORMATION ON OUR MISSING IN ACTION IN LAOS. VISITS BY THE MONTGOMERY COMMITTEE STAFFDEL AND CODEL AND VARIOUS APPROACHES BY THE EMBASSY TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE HAVE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIA QUESTION. THE LAO HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD LOOK FOR OUR MIAS IN THE PROCESS OF LOOKING FOR THEIR OWN, THE DIFFICULTY OF THEIR TERRAIN AND THE HIGHER PRIORITY THEY ACCORDED TO RECONSTRUCTION OF THE COUNTRY MEANS A VERY LOW PRIORITY IS BEING ASSIGNED THE MIA PROBLEM.

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10. THUS THERE IS A BASIC CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES POSITION STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIA QUESTION AND EXCLUDING CONSIDERATION OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND THE LPDR POSITION ATTACHING VERY LOW ORDER OF PRIORITY TO THE MIA QUESTION AND MAKING ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AN INDISPENSABLE CONDITION TO IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS.

11. HOWEVER, EVEN IF THE MIA QUESTION AND THE SPECIFIC PROHIBITION ON ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO LAOS COULD BE RESOLVED, THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF OTHER NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES DOES NOT SUGGEST THAT THESE TWO DEVELOPMENTS WOULD LEAD TO ANY GREAT BREAKTHROUGH IN IMPROVEMENT OF US/LAO RELATIONS. JAPAN, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AUSTRALIA, THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND THAILAND ALL HAVE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF ONE SORT OR ANOTHER IN LAOS. NONE OF THESE COUNTRIES HAS EXPERIENCED ANY PARTICULAR AMELIORATION OF ITS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH LAOS BECAUSE OF ITS ASSISTANCE CONTRIBUTION. ALL OF THEM HAVE BECOME AWARE OF THE LPDR INABILITY TO ABSORB ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE EFFECTIVELY. THE LPDR HAS STATED IT WANTS AID FROM ALL SOURCES BUT IT DIVIDES THE COUNTRIES WITH WHICH IT MAINTAINS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS INTO TWO CATEGORIES: FRATERNAL COUNTRIES (COMMUNIST) AND FRIENDLY COUNTRIES (NON-COMMUNIST). THE MAJOR ECONOMIC AID DONORS EXCEPT FOR USSR AND PRC ARE IN THE LATTER CATEGORY BUT THE BETTER RELATIONS ARE MAINTAINED WITH THOSE IN THE FORMER.

12. AGAIN, IF THE MIA PROBLEM AND THE SPECIFIC LEGISLATIVE PROHIBITION AGAINST AID TO LAOS COULD SOMEHOW BE RESOLVED AND EVEN IF THE LAO INABILITY TO ABSORB ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE COULD BE SOMEHOW CORRECTED, IT WOULD STILL BE NECESSARY TO ADDRESS THE IMPORTANT QUESTION OF "HUMAN RIGHTS". 76 VIENTIANE 1255 ON "HUMAN RIGHTS IN LAOS - 1976" AND OUR SUBSEQUENT REPORTING ON CONTINUED ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND CONFINEMENT WITHOUT DUE PROCESS GIVE AN IDEA OF THE DIMENSIONS OF THIS PROBLEM IN LAOS. WHILE THEY DO NOT APPROACH THOSE OF THE SAME PROBLEM IN VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA, THEY ARE NEVERTHELESS CONSIDERABLE AND
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EXPANDING.

13. GIVEN THE PREEMINENCE OF VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN LAOS AND THE PREDOMINANCE OF VIETNAMESE MILITARY POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, IT SEEMS THAT THE FUTURE COURSE OF U.S. RELATIONS WITH LAOS WILL BE LARGELY DETERMINED BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF U.S. RELATIONS WITH VIET-NAM.

14. THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR RELATIONS WITH VIET-NAM IS LIKELY IN TURN TO BE AFFECTED BY THE WAY IN WHICH OTHER SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES REGARD VIET-NAM. TWO QUITE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, STRONGLY ANTI-COMMUNIST THAILAND AND EXTREMELY COMMUNIST KAMPUCHEA, INFLUENCED NO DOUBT BY HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS, APPEAR TO BE, RESPECT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, FOREIGN RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 04-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE000885
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: S/S-O:PRHAYES
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770003-0700
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770193/baaaeuzz.tel
Line Count: 216
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f19584de-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: (A) 75 VIENTIANE 5728, (B) 75 STATE 270314, (C) VIENTIANE 6476, (D) VIENTIANE 537, (E) 76 STATE 134812, (F) 76 VIENTIANE 1310, (G) 76 STATE 144785, (H) 76 VIENTIANE 1420, (I) 76 VIENTIANE 1723, (J) 76 VIENTIANE A-40.
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3681308
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FUTURE COURSE OF U.S. RELATIONS WITH LAOS
TAGS: PFOR, LA, US, LPDR
To: BANGKOK HONG KONG MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f19584de-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009